

Statecraft and sovereignty in Mohammed V of Morocco's Tangiers Speech (1947)

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Any speech which is mere rhetoric is stillborn. Of all the speeches to have survived, not a single one has not been an act, therefore one cannot but weigh up the act against the word.¹

— Joseph Reinach

In this article, we analyse the speech delivered in Tangier on Thursday 10 April 1947 by His Majesty the late Mohammed V. The essential objective of the speech was to develop one key idea and it is this idea which, in our view, renders the speech historic. The speech is generally alluded to when illustrating the King's courage and determination to proclaim his country's independence, as well as to recall the major error of judgment by the French State in exiling the Sultan after he made the speech.

While sharing in this conviction, I wish to revisit the contents of the speech with a view to determining its true originality and real strength at the political level. It undoubtedly constitutes a demand, addressing as it does the country's need for independence, but what I should like to dwell on in particular are his views on the transformation of the Moroccan State.

In the Tangier speech, the King manifests his determination to gain independence for his country, despite the actual word 'independence' not being mentioned. But what needs to be noted in particular is the sovereign's post-independence political agenda, namely the type of sovereignty to be re-established and the type of State to be rebuilt.

The idea which we attempt to develop through a brief reading of this speech revolves around the transformation after independence of the Alaouite monarchy — the royal institution — by Mohammed V, that is to say the transformation of the modern Moroccan State by, and within the context of, the Alaouite dynasty.

We believe that a reading of the Tangier speech not only affords us insight into aspects of the past but also, and more importantly, a clearer understanding of the nature of present-day Moroccan politics.

King Mohammed V, scrupulously respecting theoretical and practical rhetorical principles, begins by outlining the nature of the monarchy and the government in an independent Morocco. Unlike the political movements calling for independence at the time, both in the Arab world (including within Morocco itself) and on the African continent, the King of Morocco is not

¹ For this text see Philippe-Joseph Salazar, *L'art de parler, Anthologie des manuels d'éloquence* (Paris: Klincksieck, Cadratin Series, 2003): 302.

satisfied with simply trying to attain that first step, *viz.* national sovereignty, but also envisages the nature of the government to be constituted. The royal speech of Tangier informs us that these two political acts go hand in hand and, once achieved, would result in the restoration of that continuity which had been interrupted by the protectorate period. The purpose of independence is very clearly determined: to restore, first of all, the power solidly in place before the arrival of the French and the Spanish, and secondly, the political system of that former power.

At the time of the speech, two fundamental elements constituted a hindrance to the King's sovereignty: the effective presence in the country of two foreign forces, and the rise of a national political movement drawing legitimacy from its call for the country's independence.²

Attaining independence thus became an imperative first step for the monarchy, if it were to embrace the first political rule corresponding to its very nature, namely, to be sovereign. Throughout history, the principle underpinning any traditional monarchy has been that the representative of the people is One, and this principle is summed up very well by one of the great founders of modern political thought, Thomas Hobbes, who writes as follows:

That King whose power is limited, is not superiour to him, or them that have the power to limit it; and he that is not superiour, is not supreme; that is to say not Sovereign. The Sovereignty therefore was alwaies in that Assembly which had the Right to Limit him.³

So this, then, is Mohammed V's first objective: to affirm his supremacy over any other existing force in the country as a means not of claiming his sovereignty but rather of exercising it.

This is followed by the second step to be taken, that of asserting such sovereignty as would ensure continuity in the nature of the Moroccan monarchy, in other words a monarchy in step with Islamic political thinking and practice. The King of Morocco's legitimacy derives from his Sharifian ancestry; he is the representative of divine law and therefore the leader of the believers. Thus sovereignty covers the various aspects of social life, so that subjects submit to no other force or recognise no other commands save for those emanating from their Sovereign. Gratitude and submission are the key words characterising the relationship of the subjects to the sovereign, thanks to — or because of — the religious dimension.

² We refer to the Istiklal Party (meaning "independence" in Arabic), whose leaders had signed and presented to the French occupiers on 11 January 1943 (declared a public holiday some years ago) a manifesto calling for independence.

³ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XIX.

As we shall see when we begin analysing the speech, the transformation of sovereignty requires total clarity in respect of the relationship between the king and his subjects: it must be vertical and in one direction only. This single direction, moreover, denotes the clear difference and removes any confusion between this sovereignty, based on religion and therefore classic, and a sovereignty which is based on reason and referred to as modern. In the first instance, the subjects, not having entrusted their rights to the governing party, are not, to use Hobbes' term, the ones who brought about their relationship with the governing party. Just as the latter is not, to use the same philosopher's expression, a mere player, in other words their representative. The sovereign speaks and acts in order to apply *The Book* as revealed by God through His Prophet, from whom he descends, and not to ensure rights entrusted to him by men who are his equals. The sovereign is not someone entrusted with common and public power but rather, as stated in the much-used Arabic expression, "the protector of belief and religion", the one responsible for a divine mission, having divine power.

Before moving on to the main ideas in the speech, what needs to be stressed is that Mohammed V is addressing the people of Tangier and, through them, all Moroccan people, as a true Sovereign, the only Sovereign, one who fully exercises his powers and carries out his duties and programmes; in other words, he addresses them as a Sovereign governing his people throughout the entire country. Nowhere in the speech is mention made of the terms independence, protectorate, colonisation, foreign forces, nationalist forces, resistance forces or national political parties. Throughout the speech, there is reference to what the Sovereign is doing, what he plans to do for his nation and his subjects, and what the latter will have to do for their country and for their Sovereign. It was undoubtedly this announcement of the exercise of total sovereignty, inseparable from the act of governing the whole country and all its subjects, which enraged the French colonial forces and drove them to make the choice of exiling the Sovereign.

To us it would seem that it was on this day of the Tangier speech, 10 April, that a fundamental practice saw the light of day in the act of governing, on the eve of independence and after independence, by the Moroccan monarchy, a practice which, one could state, became an integral part of the rules of the political game.

We consider that the main strength of the Moroccan monarchy, once it was restored after independence and to which Mohammed V alludes in this speech, is its assimilation of the political game rules, essentially those concerning the exercise of power in terms of the modern notion of power. To speak of modernity in relation to the Moroccan monarchy at a political level means, in actual fact, to understand that institution in terms of a modern notion of political power, to understand how it adopted that notion in order to exercise better control over the Islamic theory of this phenomenon and to

continue applying it by adapting it to the times. For the monarchical institution, if I may so say, it was a question of incorporating the essential elements of Muslim tradition into political practice, while revising and adapting them in accordance with certain aspects of modern political thinking and activity. This has become one of its fundamental features distinguishing it from other purely traditional Arab monarchies as well as completely modern Western monarchies.

Let us move on to the main ideas expressed in the royal Tangier speech. In his exordium, the sovereign recalls the first principle of the Muslim religion on which the community (or collective) is based: the belief in Allah, the true and only God. Islam is a religion which governs the behaviour of the faithful within society, the foundation of the social fabric; it is, if you like, a religion which has as its main objective to provide a foundation for the community. This objective must, however, be underpinned by convictions held by all members of the community, thereby serving as the guarantor and guide for any action taken within the social context. A Muslim community demands that every member believe, firstly, in Allah, the only and true God, and secondly, that he or she should apply the law dictated by the sacred book, the Koran.

The believer distinguishes himself amongst the members of humanity by the perfection of his belief, the quietude of his conscience and the fact that he trusts his God, in his activities as in his repose, in his joys as in the misfortunes of life... Thus we move into action only after firmly establishing the belief that we are truly one of Allah's faithful creatures.⁴

Having stressed the obligation of the Muslim believer to respect this first ethical principle, the King moves to the second section which, in terms of the rhetorical language of narration and argumentation, one may call a description of the situation of Morocco, of the Arab nation and of the Muslim community in general. Here he sets out his main initiatives to date as well as those required in future to ensure his subjects' well-being. He moves, in brief, from a description of the social, religious and political situation of his believer

⁴ Mohammed V, Tangier speech of 10 April 1947, "The Historic Voyage of the Sultan Martyr Mohammed V to the city of Tangier", Mhand El Bajlaji (Tangiers, Club de Tanger Ibn Batouta, Mhand El Bajlaji, 1997). This quotation we translated ourselves, whereas, for those which follow, we relied on the translation done and published by the Association for the Promotion of Tangier, copyright deposit 1988. For purely technical reasons we were unfortunately unable to consult the official translation. The Tangiers speech is available in *The great speeches of Africa's liberation, African Yearbook of Rhetoric* 2, 3 (2011): 19-25 — which is the first English translation (by Mohamed Shahid Mathee, introduced by Ph.-J. Salazar).

subjects, emphasising his commitment at government level to ensure the fundamental values dictated by Islam of peace, dignity and prosperity, to describing the emancipation and progress of the subjects and the nation.

The political element constituting the main thrust of this section is the distinction made by the King between two periods in Moroccan history, namely the period before his reign and that of his reign, the period of regression and that of construction. It must, however, be pointed out that no link is made in the speech between the first period and the presence in the country of foreign forces, nor is there any reference to colonialism. It is his audience's passion which the Sovereign is addressing with a view to rekindling their religious, cultural and nationalistic sentiments, so that these sentiments become both the cause of the citizens' misfortunes and the source of their salvation. The attitude of the colonisers, or protectors, is thereby neutralised because, *vis-à-vis* the people, he attributes no role to the foreign forces, while, *vis-à-vis* the foreign forces, no responsibility is attributed to them — whence the lack of any justification on their part to resort to any form of sanction.

What then are the reasons for the misfortunes of Muslims (and not only Moroccans) and the cause of the catastrophes that have befallen them? According to the royal speech, the Muslim community previously possessed scientific knowledge, which had abandoned it in favour of ignorance; it had chosen justice but had deviated from this path, so that justice had given way to injustice; it used to be known for its charity but greed had got the upper hand over all generous behaviour; throughout its history it had enjoyed unity and cohesion, yet disunity had become the order of the day, separating not only the Maghreb from the Mashrek but also giving way to a split within a single country, to the extent that the individual had become a stranger to his true brother. Thus, concludes the Sovereign, "we have become alienated from our sacred rights due to our ignorance, and the unity of our country is torn apart because of the mistakes we have made in this regard".

If, however, a certain degree of fatalism was to blame for this unfortunate situation, the Divine Will had shown mercy on the country. "Providence", states the King, "has fortunately inspired us in the indulgence of its mercy and guided us along the right path of salvation by elevating us to the dignity of Sovereign of this country". As a sovereign elected by God, the King was determined to assume his duty and accomplish his mission:

We have deployed all our means to redress our mistakes and remedy our misfortunes. We have endeavoured to point out the means of attaining present and future happiness, without ever deviating from the principles of our religion, which has brought together the hearts of all Moslems and made them to beat in unison; which has pushed the Arab and Muslim peoples to assist one another, so that the basis

of this league, which has strengthened the ties amongst all Arabs wherever they might be, has finally enabled their Kings and leaders, both in the East and the West, to unify their paths and march towards moral progress, the greatness of Islam, and Arab glory.

And finally, the King relies on a fundamental rhetorical procedure to lay a firm foundation for the new era of the Alaouite monarchy, which is the method known as analogy. The sovereign speaks of the period of obscurantism and darkness characterised by ignorance, injustice, greed and disunity, following which the Divine Will intervened to elect the man who would save them, and thanks to whom all this would be reversed. Thus, in irreversible fashion, would begin the future period of light, knowledge and justice, of benevolence and unity. Here the clear reference is to the transformation of the Arab-Muslim community, alluding to the beginning of the community's foundation with the coming of the prophet Sidna Mohammed.⁵ In the history of the Muslim community, the demarcation between the periods before and after the revelation of the Holy Koran is made in terms identical to those used by the sovereign.

This analogy is acceptable in religious terms because it is made by a King of Sharifian descent, whose ancestry goes back to the Prophet himself. Politically, it is relevant because it glosses over the whole Protectorate period, thus avoiding any allusion to responsibility, either of the Kings who preceded him to the throne or of the foreign colonial forces.⁶ The analogy is also

⁵ The Moroccan monarchy thus assimilates a fundamental principle pertaining to the foundation of a community, that of considering it as sacred, something which is, in fact, not specific to the Islamic tradition. Hannah Arendt mentions this in relation to the Romans: "At the heart of Roman politics", she writes, "from the beginning of the republic until virtually the end of the Imperial era, stands the conviction of the sacredness of foundations, in the sense that once something had been founded, it remains binding for all future generations. To be engaged in politics meant first and foremost to preserve the foundation of the city of Rome": Hannah Arendt, *Between past and future* (New York: The Viking Press, 1961): 21. (See too pg. 121 on the religious dimension of this sacred foundation). We should add that, in order for the founding of a community to be endowed with a sacred character, the king must pronounce himself to be a descendant of the Prophet; in the case of fundamentalist movements, they must endeavour to reproduce the type of government practised by the four khalifes who succeeded the Prophet; while for the Shiites, they must bestow some form of continuity on the reign of the fourth Khalife, Ali Ibn Abi Talib, the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet.

⁶ Let us not forget that historians speak of the weakness of the Kings reigning from the beginning of the 1912 Protectorate up until Mohammed V's accession to the throne. Others go so far as to recall that those Kings gave their backing to the French and Spanish colonisers' repression of resistance movements in both the North and South of Morocco. The only King to whom Mohammed V refers in his speech is

relevant because, as pointed out earlier, it furthermore brushes aside all local movements claiming in any way to represent the Moroccan people, whether they be purely political movements, resistance movements, or both.

Moving on to the second part of this section devoted to narration and argumentation, which in itself is very closely related to the analogy just mentioned, the late Mohammed V, not satisfied with confirming his status as the supreme guide, also and especially wishes to emphasise the exercise of that which his calling as Sovereign confers on him, namely power and government. The King, placing himself in the present, describes his manner of governing, enumerates the various construction works in which he has invested, mentions the projects he has completed and speaks of those he still intends undertaking.

In this context, Islam once again remains the fundamental reference, whether implicitly or explicitly. It is through its teaching that the Sovereign begins to list his accomplishments:

Being convinced that those means which contributed to the progress of our glorious Ancestors represent the only way for our people to progress, we aim to expand the teaching of subjects taught formerly and also introduce new ones, the former to light up the soul with the light of faith and the torch of morality, the latter to facilitate progress and acquire the wherewithal to fight for a living... Schools are established for young Moroccans to be taught the tenets of virtue, and fortunately we are seeing the breaking dawn of an encouraging success.

What is the relationship between schooling and Islam? Firstly, it is through schooling that one passes from darkness to light, from ignorance to knowledge, and it must also not be forgotten that, in the Islamic imagination, any reform, any renewal, any improvement in behaviour or a situation, either individual or social, depends on writing and reading. In such instances, it is difficult for any Muslim not to recall the first verse of the Holy Koran received by the Prophet: *Ikrae*, which means Read (imperative form of the verb to read). Neither should we forget the importance of the *Madaris* (plural of *Madrassa*, meaning school) throughout the history of the Arab-Muslim civilisation, both in the East and in the West.

From teaching, the Sovereign moves to other areas where his government needs to intervene:

Through His divine grace and the effect of His goodness, we are

Hassan I, who reigned long before the Protectorate, and whose reign he refers to as being that of a great King of Morocco of the Alaouite dynasty.

guarding the integrity of the country, we are working to guarantee a brilliant and glorious future, and we are moving towards the attainment of this hope, which will bring new life to the heart of every Moroccan... We have travelled everywhere in order to give our full attention to all the regions of Morocco and attend to the fulfilment of their needs.

Finally, following a description of the exercising of government activities, the sovereign raises that of power. Here again, the King speaks of his present achievements and his future projects. What does the exercise of power entail? It means appointing his representatives across the various regions of the country, determining their prerogatives and, in the final instance, defining the nature of the relationship between the King and his people.

The King enjoins all his representatives in the various regions of the Kingdom to work in the general interest of the Moroccan people:

In absolute devotion to the Sharifian Throne which, for centuries, has ensured the unity of the people, the integrity of the Empire and the happiness of its inhabitants of all categories. Given these considerations, we exhort all delegates, pashas, local governors, *cadis*⁷ and civil servants of every rank whom we honour with our trust and in whom we place all our hope, to observe properly this imperious national duty.

Representation is always in a vertical direction and it is granted by the Sovereign so that social projects and projects in the general interest may be carried out in his name. All power to act in the service of the people and the nation is power emanating from the King and granted by him. Power is not divisible, neither at its source nor at its destination. Any progress which the country may experience in future must incorporate this constant element: that being invested with any power whatsoever and exercising that power may only take place and be carried out through the power emanating from the Sovereign, just as it may represent no source or force other than that of the Sovereign.

Thus the relation of the people to the Sovereign is one of submission, and the consent of the people in respect of their sovereign is expressed exclusively through allegiance. One does not transmit one's rights to the King for him to take care of them; rather one shows respect and gratitude to the sacred person of the King. Regarding the transmission of rights, the logic pertaining here is that of a contract to be respected by the person to whom those rights have been transmitted, since his person

⁷ *Cadi* is the Arabic term for a magistrate.

represents the contracting parties as a whole. In the second case, on the other hand, the logic is that of a prayer for the Sovereign to be guided, protected and helped by the One he represents, the Supreme Creator Allah. In our view, this is the salient line in the speech made by King Mohammed V in Tangiers and the reason for it being called historic. It redefines the nature of monarchical power in Morocco, for his own reign but also for the future of the monarchy. He chooses an Islamic conception of power, or at least the most widely spread interpretation of Islam throughout the history of the Arab world, as much on a practical level as on the level of the imagination. According to this interpretation, a king is on the throne to reign, but to reign essentially means to govern. We would almost want to say that it is precisely because a king must govern that he must also be sovereign. Sovereignty is necessary in order to meet the demands and prerequisites of government. It is around this relationship between sovereignty and government that the game is played out by existing political forces, while casting a favourable eye on the democratic spirit.

(Translated by Bas Angelis)

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